

1999 : THE SHORTWAVE YEAR IN REVIEW
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[VOA CW had time for about half of this on Dec 25; the entire report appears on WORLD OF RADIO 1018]

PEOPLE

People we've heard for years on shortwave retired: Sara Manobla in Israel, Al Simon in Sweden. And behind the scenes, Norway's long-serving frequency manager Olav Grimdalen.

Change of command at VOA, from Evelyn Lieberman to Sandy Ungar.

Parting was not pleasant for Randi Steele in a dispute over hate speech at WBCQ.

Allan Weiner and Elayne Star got married in a Maine mall costumed as Prince Charming and Snow White, even tho he was being treated for viral encephalitis.

After rehabilitation, Manolo de la Rosa is back on Radio Habana Cuba and Rebelde.

Moscow's DX producer Pavel Mikhailov, returned after being sidelined with heart problems, as did the prolific DX editor Wolfgang Bueschel in Germany.

Ninety-two-year-old Alistair Cooke underwent angioplasty, and just had to miss sending a Letter from America.

OBITUARIES

Among those who entertained us, lost in 1999 were Derek Nimmo of BBC's Just A Minute; Allan Maitland of CBC's As It Happens; and Jean Shepherd, also a ham, but whose old programs continued on WBCQ.

And a sad farewell to two great Scandinavians who informed the shortwave community, Arne Skoog, founder of Sweden Calling DXers, and Jens Frost, longtime editor of the World Radio TV Handbook.

Judging from reviews of the last two Handbooks under new editorship, omitting more and more info, it too might as well be deceased.

ENGLISH AND OTHER LANGUAGES

Just when the world's attention focused on Jordan at the death of King Hussein, Radio Jordan decided to stop broadcasting in English. The same happened in Turkey after the quakes.

Israel's 5-minute prime time English news to North America petered out.

Radio Pakistan finally gave up its dictation-speed English news, while FEBA Seychelles started [planning] Specialized English, patterned after VOA Special English.

Brazil's external service, including English disappeared after a painful period of neglect.

But Oman surprised us with an hour in English; now they only need clear frequencies.

YLE Radio Finland provides not only Classical Latin but now two minority Finno Ugric languages of Russia: Mari and Udmurt.

BBC is putting megapounds into internet services in more and more languages. Yet it claimed the largest worldwide radio audience of 143 million, of which 35 million adults listen in English.

BBC found German to be a language not important enough to continue.

Facing severe budget cuts, Deutsche Welle had to cancel several languages, even Spanish and Japanese at yearend, with hundreds of jobs to be lost.

The future of many VOA language services is also under review, due to inadequate funding. VOA is officially no longer under State Department control, and the US Information Agency has ceased to exist.

DISASTERS

Al Weiner's third ill-fated radio-ship, The Electra, sank in Rhode Island.

HCJB continued to quiver in Quito, too close for comfort

to increasing volcanic activity.

The primary and backup undersea power cables to Norway's shortwave transmitters both broke, putting one of their sites off the air.

Hurricane force winds damaged antennas at Radio Sweden and destroyed a log periodic.

Deutsche Welle was blacked out half a day by a fire in the radio-house it is trying to vacate.

The war in the Balkans led to broadcast developments. Though its main transmitters in Bosnia were never hit, Radio Yugoslavia was off the air for weeks.

For the Kosovar refugees, Radio Netherlands broadcast Radio 21 from Macedonian camps.

Other stations added special services, including Austria, BBC, Deutsche Welle and VOA.

Voice of Russia started a two hour, six language Balkan service.

The strife in Timor provoked expanded 24 hour broadcasts from Portugal, refugee programs from BBC and the Red Cross, forces services from Australia, New Zealand and Thailand.

JAMMING

Thanks primarily to China and Cuba, we still suffer the bane of shortwave jamming.

Cuba continues to jam WRMI even when it's broadcasting Prague or the Vatican.

Any frequency used by Marti at any time now or in the past is likely to be jammed all the time, causing collateral damage to Mexico, Argentina, Chile and others.

China is too insecure to allow its people to listen to VOA or Radio Free Asia; and now also helps the North Koreans to jam.

RELAYS

VOA's Tinian site got up to speed, allowing Poro, Philippines, to close. And Iranawila, Sri Lanka continued its long phase-in; finally by yearend, enough of it going to turn off the old site at Ekala.

China started relays via Cuba, but still does not acknowledge them. Anti-Castro elements claim they are a cover for electronic eavesdropping against the US.

Radio Australia went another year prohibited from using its own Cox Peninsula site. Legislation is underway to allow licensing of foreign broadcasters via Australia, especially HCJB which plans a new site in Kununurra.

Merlin made a deal for relay exchanges with Taiwan, which also benefited the Christian Scientists, no longer owners of KHBI.

WWCR became the only shortwave outlet for the British government's London Radio Service. But Ireland's RTE quit WWCR where it got its shortwave start.

CLANDESTINE

Nigeria's Radio Kudirat came back for another 6.5 months on shortwave until it was sure it could start broadcasting inside Nigeria. For a few months, ABS Radio broadcast to Nigeria from RFPI. Now, there are no more clandestines for Nigeria.

Radio MINURCA tried to serve the Central African Republic with western entertainment, news and election campaigning, but had to manage with nor more than one kilowatt.

Voice of United and Free Ethiopia disappeared, but Ethiopia, Eritrea, Somalia and Sudan remain a hotbed of counter-clandestines too complex to convey.

Radio Netherlands' Madagascar station found time to broadcast three Tamil clandestines, and one Burmese.

Sri Lankan violence was stirred up by LTTE broadcasts, and the CIS accommodated another Tamil service, IBC.

Voice of Jammu Kashmir Freedom was new, or a new name.

The shadowy Iranian clandestine, Radio Internationale,

accused by some exiles of being communist, started 1999 via WWCR, and ended the year out of Pridnestrovie instead.

Russia started a Radio Free Chechnya, asserting it cannot be defined as clandestine.

Radio Free Asia no longer needs relays via KNLS Alaska, but one year later we are still waiting on Wu.

Thanks to KWHR in Hawaii, Vietnam got more and more clandestines, Radio Free Vietnam, and Que Huong Radio.

Making DX news but hardly heard by anyone because of flea-power were Bougainville clandestines on 75 meters.

Nazis and neo-Nazis found another shortwave station willing to spread their big lies, WGTG.

Colombia busted Radio Patria Libre, but FARC Voz de la Resistencia clandestine services quintupled.

PROGRAMMING

RFPI undertook a major new effort, Progressive News Network.

Among the BBC programs no longer to be heard are From the Weeklies and the Vintage Chart Show; from CBC, the Great Eastern; from WBCQ, Pagan Potpourri.

And was October 23rd really the final, final Radio Saint Helena Day? If so, I say it's time for Tristan da Cunha Day.

Spain replaced Distance Unknown with Radio Waves, always with radio music.

XERMX started airing Dxperience, and Encuentro DX began to appear on Radio Mil.

WBCQ brought us new media programs such as Real Radio, Tom and Darrel and Off the Hook.

ANNIVERSARIES

Voice of Russia was 70 in 1999, if you include its previous identity as Radio Moscow.

Radio Australia just celebrated its 60th birthday, quietly since the powers that be do all they can to diminish it.

Radio Casino, Costa Rica, on 5954, marked its 54th anniversary.

And WBCQ its first.

PROPAGATION

As another solar cycle approaches a peak, the maximum frequency has exceeded 50 MHz; yet only three stations dare to use 25, RFPI, Germany and France.

Radio Marti finally fired up on 21 MHz, which is most immune to jamming, but that doesn't keep the dentro-Cubans from trying.

Others will not even use 21, such as RCI, and Pyongyang barely makes it up to 17. But New Zealand likes 17 so much it dropped 9 MHz at night to the detriment of the North American periphery.

SALES

Honduras' Radio International transformed into Radio Ebenezer.

Nicaragua lacks an external shortwave service, so it was nice when TIAWR in neighboring Costa Rica started carrying a program from Managua.

But then TIAWR was sold for even more hot air from the so-called University Network, already available 24 hours on 4 shortwave transmitters. George Jacobs is still offering for sale WRMI, WSHB and WRNO.

STATIONS GONE

Tahiti really seems to be gone from shortwave, despite lingering unconfirmed sightings.

Radio UNAM in Mexico turned off shortwave, after barely modulating it for months; XERTA went off, but plans a comeback from a new studio on a new frequency.

Guyana is gone, shortwave transmitter parts keeping

mediumwave on the air.

Merlin Network One finally crashed its overextended 24 hour multiple frequency service, mostly with pop music; then returned gradually with time actually paid for.

NEW STATIONS

New or revived shortwave stations in 1999 include:

Radio Villa, La Sencilla in the Dominican Republic, specializing in bachata music.

In Bolivia, Radio Mosoj Chaski and Radio Constelacion.

In Peru, Radio Panorama, Radio Manantial, Radio Amistad and Radio San Antonio.

In Israel, thanks to Turkish quake relief, Defense Forces station Galei Zahal.

In the USA, one new shortwave station started: WTJC which is working till Jesus comes.

Thanks to Merlin, Wales Radio International materialized out of nowhere.

STRIKES

Among the stations disrupted by strikes were CBC and RCI, Radio France Internationale, KBS Korea, and Radio Nacional, Paraguay.

TECHNICAL

Digital Radio Mondiale carried out more and more tests from Sackville, Wertachtal, Sines and Bonaire, supposedly the wave of the future on shortwave. RCI even installed two new transmitters capable of digital.

But WGTG pushed SSB as the only way to go, and managed to get more weird out of band frequencies from 91 to 24 meters.

Several American shortwave stations limped along in 1999: WRNO on a barely audible, off-frequency backup unit since its main transmitter burned up in December 98.

WMLK was slowly trying to improve its antennas and transmitter.

WWBS only four hours a week, as it was sued for interference in Macon.

WJCR acquired two VOA transmitters from Bethany but remains undermodulated.

WRMI finally started a North American service on 40 meters, but put its most popular programs in the middle of the night.

WBCQ started testing transmitter two, tho time was still available on one.

Radio Miskut, Nicaragua, got a new transmitter but the hurricane set them back so it's still hard to hear.

LRA36 Antarctica got a new 10 kilowatt transmitter, but audibility abroad remains sporadic.

A sigh of relief at RFPI, finally connected to a modern high-capacity powerline. Major expansion is projected.

Voice of Greece received transmitters from VOA but finding the funds to install them is frustrating.

Lithuania got a brand new American shortwave transmitter, but budget cuts may prevent them from using it. Latvia closed its external service, including token English, but still tried to rent out the transmitter.

Frederikstad, Norway's transmitter wound up in Gabon at least as spare parts for Africa One.

Ukraine had to close down, at least for a while, several of its shortwave transmitters, including a megawatter.

German workers just laid off by Telefunken are bitter that their know-how but not their jobs have been bought out by Continental.

The worst engineering award goes to Romania, wiping out the 16 meter band with spurs, and a perpetual roar on some of its frequencies as well as relays of Moldova which survived government threats to kill the external service.

YUKKERS

CFRX Toronto broadcast nothing for a week before anyone noticed. Their automatic identifier machine failed to return to programming.

This year's honors for broadcasting tapes backwards go to Radio Habana Cuba and Voice of Indonesia.

For VOA News Now, I'm Glenn Hauser.

[For more details on these stories, and their always attributed sources, see our MONITORING TIMES columns from March 1999 to February 2000, and/or the DX Reports archived on our website]